

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJ: THE ITALIAN CHURCH AND ITALIAN POLITICS

REF: ROME 18326

1. FOLLOWING UP ON MEETINGS WITH ROME'S CARDINAL POLETTI, DCM AND POL COUNSELOR MADE CONTACT WITH BISHOP BARTOLETTI, SECRETARY OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE. BARTOLETTI WAS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED TO SEE US REPS AND TO HEAR FIRST HAND OF USG'S INTEREST IN ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE.

2. IN RESPONSE TO A GENERAL QUESTION ABOUT POLITICAL INTENTIONS OF ITALIAN CHURCH (FOLLOWING ON RECENT ANTI-COMMUNIST DECLARATION OF BISHOPS CONFERENCE, (ROME 18326). BARTOLETTI NOTED THAT CHURCH AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DC) HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVELY DIVORCED SINCE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL. IN THE INTERVENING YEARS, CHURCH HAS LOST TOUCH WITH ITALIAN POLITICS AND DC HAS LOST TOUCH WITH ITALIAN PEOPLE. THE DC, HE SAID BADLY NEEDS REFORM AND RENEWAL, AND REESTABLISHMENT OF AN ACTIVE, VITAL, DAILY LINK WITH THE PEOPLE; AND THE CHURCH NEEDS TO BECOME ITS CONSTANT CONSTRUCTIVE CRITIC. HE SAID THE CHURCH WILL TRY TO REVITALIZE ITS VARIOUS GROUPS WITH THE INTENT OF STIMULATING THE CATHOLICS TO RECOGNIZE THE DANGERS OF COMMUNISM AS A MEANS OF MOBILIZING THE PRO-DC VOTE. MUCH WILL THEN DEPEND ON THE DC'S ABILITY TO PULL ITSELF TOGETHER AS A CREDIBLE PARTY WITH THE PEOPLE'S INTERESTS AT
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HEART. HE ADDED THAT THE ITALIAN CHURCH MUST MOVE WITH GREAT CARE,

FOR OVERLY VIGOROUS ACTION IN POLITICS COULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

3. WHEN ASKED ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BISHOPS' RECENT STATEMENT ON COMMUNISM, BISHOP BARTOLETTI REPLIED THAT THE BISHOPS INDIVIDUALLY WOULD BRING IT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE FAITHFUL IN EVERY PARISH. (WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS THAT THIS PROCESS HAS ALREADY BEGUN, AS HAS AN EFFORT TO EDUCATE SOME PRIESTS WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH THE BASIC POSITION STATED BY THE BISHOPS.)

4. ON THE PCI, BARTOLETTI COMMENTED THAT IT TRIES CONSTANTLY TO OBTAIN SOME INDICATION OF APPROVAL, OR EVEN TOLERANCE, FROM THE CHURCH. THIS EXPLAINS, HE SAID, THEIR RESTRAINED (IN COMPARISON TO THE PSI) ATTITUDE ON ABORTION. HE ADDED FIRMLY THAT THE CHURCH IS DETERMINED NOT TO GIVE THE PCI ANY SIGN OF TOLERANCE OR APPROVAL.

5. BARTOLETTI STRESSED THE GREAT PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN ROME - FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR ITALY'S POLITICAL FUTURE. HE IS OBVIOUSLY DISCOURAGED AT THE PROSPECT. HE SAID THE DC IS IN VERY BAD SHOE IN ROME. IT HAS VIRTUALLY NO CONTACT WITH THE VERY LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THE SUBURBAN SLUMS THAT SURROUND ROME, WHERE PEOPLE TEND TO REGARD THE DC AS THE "ENEMY" AND THE PCI AS THEIR "FRIEND". WHILE HE HAS STRESSED THIS POINT TO DC LEADERS WHO SAY THEY UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM, HE COMMENTED WITH DISCOURAGEMENT THAT THOSE DC LEADERS AREN'T YET DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT. (HIS REMARKS ON ROME LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE CHURCH IS PREPARED TO WORK DISCREETLY TOWARD THE SAME END AS THE DC IN ROME, BUT THAT IT IS GETTING LITTLE RESPONSE FROM THE DC.)

5. COMMENT: BARTOLETTI IS AN INTELLIGENT, CAUTIOUS, DISCREET MAN. HE CLEARLY UNDERSTANDS THE ITALIAN POLITICAL PROBLEM AND IS PLAINLY VERY WORRIED BY IT. HE UNDOUBTEDLY ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE CONSENSUS WITHIN THE ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE. WE BELIEVE THAT HE (AND THE BISHOPS) WILL BE ACTIVE BUT HE IS VERY CONSCIOUS OF THE DANGER OF OVER-ACTING. VOLPE

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